



At a price ... (clockwise from left) a drawing of the new Pettit and Sevitt Lowline, which costs \$360,000 (plus council and site costs); Ken Woolley who designed it; Durbach Block's \$220,000 Clock House and a \$200,000 Happy Haus home being lowered into position on Queensland's Stradbroke Island.

Top photo: Peter Rae



and Caroline Pidcock, for 90 per cent of the houses he sells.

Since about 80 per cent of his customers are not interested in whether or not his products are architecturally designed, it is not a big marketing point. However, any customer who has inspected other project homes tends to notice the difference an architect makes. "They won't come in with that on their checklist but they will notice," Condoleon says.

"We are looking for an edge ... One of my goals is that the first thing they do is say 'wow'."

Under most arrangements, architects hand over their plans to a project home company and are paid royalties for designs that are sold.

But under Wheeler's new venture, Cosmopolitan Homes remains the builder and Wheeler does not let go of the plans. Just as with a bespoke house, he takes the plans to council for approval, authorises any variation in the construction and answers certification inquiries.

He takes advantage of Cosmopolitan's ability to keep costs down by reducing the use of steel in a building, minimising plumbing and ensuring that measurements are in keeping with the size of materials, reducing the need to cut bricks and plasterboard on-site.

The new Woolley house

Ken Woolley said he found house buyers' tastes had changed when he dusted off his old Pettit and Sevitt plans. Whereas his original modular house was presented in its three-bedroom design, the new version will have four bedrooms to fit demand. He says the rooms themselves have also increased in size by about 10 per cent.

"I think that's become something of a reasonable norm, given most kids have their own computer and the tendency is to have more sports junk than in the 1960s and 1970s."

But he is horrified by the overregulation of building that increases costs and extends the time taken to get a house built. Whereas a Pettit and Sevitt house could be built in three to four months from the time of the customer's order, it could now take well over a year. He estimates the costs of paying council fees and meeting the environmental requirements of the BASIX regime, the NSW building sustainability index, to be about \$50,000 for a \$300,000 house.

"You have got to wonder whether the benefits from it match that [cost]," he says. "Our old Pettit and Sevitts would never have complied with BASIX. [But] have they been such bad houses for 40 years?"